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#CHIversity: Implications for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Campaigns

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Abstract

In this alt.chi paper, we reflect on #CHIversity; a grassroots campaign highlighting feminist issues related to diversity and inclusion at CHI2017, and in HCI more widely. #CHIversity was operationalised through a number of activities including: collaborative cross-stitch and 'zine' making events; the development of a 'Feminist CHI Programme'; and the use of a Twitter hashtag '#CHIversity'. These events granted insight into how diversity discourses are approached within the CHI community. From these recognitions we provide examples of how diversity and inclusion can be promoted at future SIGCHI events. These include fostering connections between attendees, discussing 'polarizing' research in a conservative political climate, and encouraging contributions to the growing body of HCI literature addressing feminisms and related subjects. Finally, we suggest how these approaches and benefits can translate to HCI events extending beyond CHI, where exclusion may routinely go undetected.

Author Keywords

CHIversity; conference; feminism; activism; subversion; diversity; inclusion

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous;

Introduction

Declarations of dedication to the values of equality and diversity have come to be commonplace within funding bodies, research associations and higher education organisations. Through diversification of their workforce, these bodies aspire that in embracing diversity, this will lead to more varied perspectives, and generate more creative solutions. Yet through a “*combination of overuse, imprecise on, inertia and self-serving intentions*” [13], the term ‘diversity’ has been seemingly removed and re-appropriated from its original idealistic intentions. The simple referencing of this word has been mistakenly equated with the active process of analysis and inclusion of bringing these ideals into reality [13]. When diversity is mobilised through the vehicles of inclusivity and intersectionality [9], it becomes an active, dynamic process of ensuring minority voices are heard by the community, and celebrating the richness of perspective they bring. In recent years, academic communities within the ACM, and SIGCHI specifically, have put in place a number of considerations to promote diversity at hosted events. We intend to build on both these institutional and our own ACM-member led initiatives to present actionable directions and design implications for future campaigns and policy that the SIGCHI community, and ACM more broadly, can take to move closer to an equitable research space.

As Balaam writes on the topic of Women’s Health at CHI: “*we [the organisers] are acutely attuned to how the current political and social climate impacts our work*” [3]. To build on this understanding, in this paper we aim to further the inclusion of feminist activities and scholars not only through publications, but also through the experiences of, and social climates at ACM events

and conferences. We aspire to build on the essential cornerstones of long-term social transformations that HCI researchers are beginning to embrace.

Reflecting on the use of the hashtag “#CHIiversity” at CHI2017, we further discuss its associated activities that aimed to promote diversity and inclusion at the conference. We start by unfolding the historical and academic justification for launching this campaign, then recount the means by which we aspired to promote discussions of diversity, inclusion, and feminisms at CHI2017. In conclusion, we present our primary outcomes, including how our campaign enacted the *active* elements of inclusion and diversity at the conference, so often excluded from like approaches.

Our contributions to the CHI community are, in feminist spirit [6], both theoretical and generative. (1) First, we contribute to the growing body of theoretically engaged HCI literatures that address feminisms and related subjects. (2) Second, we provide generative examples of how diversity and inclusion can be promoted at the SIGCHI conference. These processes include fostering connections between attendees and opening spaces of dialogue. (3) Finally, we discuss how these approaches and benefits can translate for HCI events including (but also extending beyond) CHI, where exclusion may routinely go undetected.

Starting #CHIiversity

Feminist and social justice oriented research has been rapidly gaining traction within the HCI community. Emerging literature has been wide-ranging, both in topic (from women’s health [4], to hacker spaces [10], to sexual pleasure [5]), in choice of application of



"We are a group of intersectional feminists who aim to raise awareness of feminist issues in HCI by being overtly critical and political of the field, raising voices of underrepresented groups and topics, presenting tangible outcomes, and taking on an activist role for this. We create a supportive and collaborative environment within Open Lab, academia, industry, and beyond. We are fempower.tech."

Figure 1: The fempower.tech logo and mission statement. Further information can be found on the group's website: <https://openlab.ncl.ac.uk/fempower.tech/>

critical lenses [6,18,19], in use of situated knowledges [12], or application of theoretical frameworks [15].

Furthermore, intersectional theory has begun to appear in HCI [19], with the authors of this paper striving to continue the developments of both conceptual and pragmatic understandings of this theory. Coined by legal scholar Crenshaw [7,8], intersectionality consolidates understandings of how aspects of humanity (race, sexuality etc.) do not exist in isolation, but are rather complexly interwoven and 'intersect' with each other to produce unique modes of discrimination and oppression. This framework understands identities as composites of multiple, intricate power hierarchies rather than the scrutiny of one alone: most commonly, gender. So as not to prioritise only one perspective, we aimed to approach inclusion with this theory in mind.

In this paper, we build on this diverse range of previous work, to focus on the ways in which intersectionality can be utilised as a strategy to support pragmatic and genuine opportunities for more diverse, inclusive, and equitable conference environments. Through the use of our campaign *#CHiversity*, we concentrated our efforts on activities at these intersecting values, and worked to include and collaborate with diverse groups. Here, we expand on the rationale for creating *#CHiversity*, provide a self-disclosure statement, detail the activities that were carried out at CHI2017, and contextualize the campaign itself. The campaign was set, at least in part, in the context of the conservative political climate within the USA (CHI2017 was held in Denver, Colorado, USA) and globally. Within this context, we aspired to question the aversion to diversity that is too often felt within and outside HCI venues.

fempower.tech

This paper is co-authored by researchers—all of whom are regular attendees of the CHI conference—who devised, organized and took part in the campaign. Additionally, said organisers of *#CHiversity* were all members of *fempower.tech*, a feminist technology collective within HCI based at Open Lab, Newcastle University. As such, although we do not claim to draw objective conclusions, our personal reflections on the campaign methods that we provide within this work, and the resulting impact on the organisers and the growing community of feminist researchers are nevertheless valuable.

Through a series of discussions on the integration of feminist ideals within our research, *fempower.tech* aimed to provide a more comfortable working environment through peer support. Based on this focus, a mission statement was curated to reflect the intent and shared values of the group (see Figure 1). Although originally based in Open Lab, membership expanded to other HCI research groups and beyond through events involving the wider community, evolving into a movement. We saw CHI2017 as a venue at which to perform a new, bottom-up approach to diversity and inclusion, due to: (i) the number of members of our group attending; (ii) the evolution of the "women's breakfast" into the more intersectionally-framed "diversity and inclusion lunch"; and (iii) the recent growth of social justice oriented research.

#CHiversity

"*CHiversity*" is a portmanteau of *CHI* and *diversity*, and a collective identity through which we aspired to subvert discussion in three core areas: the role of diversity in the technology sector; conversations of

inclusion within academia; and how CHI has addressed both of these issues in the past.

Past observations of the CHI Twittersphere indicate that this is a dynamic space where attendees share their thoughts, experiences and ideas through the use of hashtags (e.g. #CHI2017). We sought to use this channel to communicate both the existence of and the activities within our campaign. We used the “#CHIiversity” hashtag as the name of the campaign to clarify to those with whom we talked about the campaign that we would share information via Twitter.

Subverting CHI2017

Subversion refers to efforts that question the existing social order (such as authorities or social hierarchies) and seek to change them. However, in contrast to loud open protest, political subversion within organisational contexts tends to operate more quietly. Furthermore, Olson [16] introduces the concept of institutional subversion and states that “*subversive action takes place in institutional contexts through interactions with institutional rules, norms, and practices ... [but] is not necessarily about subverting an entire government or political regime.*” The motivation behind subversion that addresses institutional norms and rules is the ambition to make these institutions ‘better’ for those within them where ‘formal and appropriate’ methods may be inaccessible or ineffective. We believe subverting the conference through actively performed inclusivity is more powerful than passive demands for diversity.

Subversion in practice

Members of oppressed groups have practiced subversion as a form of activism for centuries. This can be evidenced through the ways in which women have

been using stitching, sewing, and other handicrafts as a form of protest to their oppression [17]. Particularly when using craft as a form of activism, creative forms of overt activism and subversion can be called craftivism (craft + activism) [1]. For example, Arpilleras (pieces of hessian fabric that women stitched scenes from their everyday experiences of oppression onto) were used by women across the world to document their experiences of oppression to subvert the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile [9]. More recently, women used craftivist techniques as a direct response to the election of US President Donald Trump by knitting pink ‘pussy hats’ to subvert the derogatory comments he had previously made towards women. Arguably, many HCI researchers have also used techniques of subversion in their research and publications through blog posts or zines, or indeed the alt.chi track at CHI itself. Balaam addresses this issue: “*by hosting [the hacking women’s health workshop] at CHI we hoped we could not only contribute to these global ripples of action and resistance, but also increase the community, profile, and voice of researchers*” [3].

#CHIiversity Subversions

In this section, we outline the activities we carried out before and during the CHI2017 conference to promote diversity, inclusion and conversations about these pressing issues. Before the conference, we (1) developed a ‘Feminist CHI Programme’, which we (2) advertised on Twitter using the #CHIiversity hashtag. Throughout the conference, we continued the use of this hashtag to document the conference as well as our developments in the (3) collaborative cross-stitch and the (4) production of a zine about attendees’ experiences of, and attitudes towards diversity at CHI2017.



Figure 2: One of our zine pages that incorporates tweets and handwritten notes to illustrate part of the story involved in the gender-neutral bathrooms at CHI2017



Figure 3: A tweet illustrating the development of the collaborative cross-stitch

A FEMINIST CHI PROGRAMME

To promote intersectionality [8,14,19], and to bring together feminist researchers from a diverse range of research areas within HCI, we developed a feminist CHI programme that we hosted on the fempower.tech website¹. This comprehensive programme included papers, workshops, and symposia being presented at the conference that were either explicitly feminist, or inherently dealt with issues of oppression, exclusion, social justice, or diversity. Prior to placing a paper on the website, authors were contacted and asked for their consent on being featured, and contributed their own suggestions for included papers. While we acknowledge creating a specialist programme may not be particularly novel at a conference (for example CHI has previously developed their own 'spotlights'), it is, to our knowledge, the first time that such a programme was developed surrounding the issues of feminisms and diversity in relation to SIGCHI conferences.

TWITTER HASHTAG

As the title of our campaign demonstrates, we made ample use of Twitter and the #CHIiversity hashtag. During the week of the conference (May 6, 2017 - May 11, 2017), we sent a total of 167 tweets with 31,200 impressions on the @fempowertech account. Furthermore, both the account and the hashtag² were in the top 10 influencers during the CHI conference. Other conference attendees used the #CHIiversity hashtag to share experiences, as well as to advocate for actions that could be taken to make CHI more

inclusive. One attendee even used the hashtag to help persuade the conference venue to establish the gender-neutral toilets that had been originally promised (see Figure 2). The hashtag also permitted attendees to connect, meeting in person to discuss over cross-stitch (see Figure 3).

COLLABORATIVE CROSS-STITCH

During CHI2017, we used collaborative subversive crafting to tackle two barriers to diversity: (1) personal wellbeing; (2) traditional models of networking. Overall, more than 15 conference attendees contributed to the colourful cross-stitch depicting the logo of *Planned Parenthood* (see Figure 4): a US-based charity providing sexual health and family planning services. The choice in design was a direct political statement: a response to the defunding of the organisation by the Republican US presidential administration in office during CHI2017.

The activity was used as a tool to support wellbeing at the conference with some participants contributing during short breaks from volunteering, with others wanting to get creative during the breaks or paper sessions. This activity was also used to subvert traditional models of networking that favour existing relationships through, for example, exclusive party invites. The collaborative cross-stitch was a way of connecting individuals who may not have otherwise connected, to bring something new to the conference, and to get to know one another through craft.

On top of these personal and community specific intents, the cross-stitching was also a subversion of the political position taken by SIGCHI itself. Although we had made attempts to include *Planned Parenthood* in

¹ Programme documented at this link: <https://openlab.ncl.ac.uk/fempower.tech/2017/04/10/chiversity-a-feminist-chi-programme/>

² See the NodeXL graph here: <http://bit.ly/2r2Miz6>



Figure 4: Picture of the finished collaborative cross-stitch Planned Parenthood logo

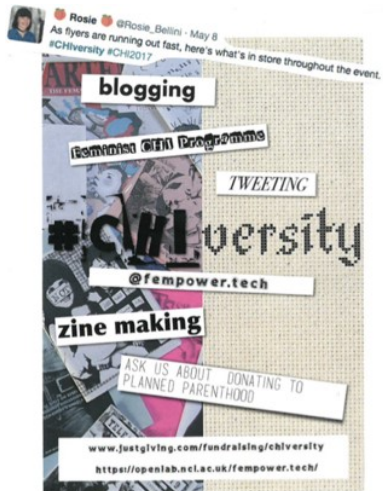


Figure 5: Front cover of the #CHiversity 2017 zine

the *Hacking Women's Health* workshop, as well as some other aspects of CHI, we were told by organisers that, as an organisation, it was too “politically polarising” to be included through official CHI channels [3]. We discuss and problematise this choice of position later in this paper.

THE #CHIVERSITY ZINE

A corresponding element of the campaign was the development of a ‘zine’; a handmade, self-published magazine. This work has a long history in intersectional feminist activism, and functions as a way to self-publish work that resists, protests, or undermines existing mainstream ideologies [11]. Within the communities of HCI and design, researchers have purposed this method to communicate research back to participants [10], or explore particularly novel areas of research³.

Together, we created a 14-page zine⁴ that illustrates our experiences of CHI2017, as well as our hopes for future CHI events. We provided participants with paper, pens, scissors, glue, and printed out tweets and Twitter analytics from the @fempowertech and #CHiversity feeds. On top of this, we set up our zine-station by the tables close to the reception of the conference where flyers, booklets, and other paper paraphernalia were placed by CHI attendees. The cover page consisted of a collage of our flyer and a #CHiversity tweet (see Figure 5). The following 12 pages detailed topics such as power-relations in CHI, creativity, or passion, and highlighted specific talks, sessions and calls for more

³ See for example Garnet Hertz's work: <http://conceptlab.com/>

⁴ The full zine can be seen here: <https://openlab.ncl.ac.uk/fempower.tech/2017/05/23/chi-zine/>

feminisms at future CHIs. The back-cover of the zine implored readers to include “more politics” and to “get madder” within their work (see Figure 6). Often, multiple people worked collaboratively to develop individual pages, and lone workers crafted pages that were inspired either by conversations with others, or by the materials that were provided by the organisers.

COLLABORATING THROUGH #CHIVERSITY

In parallel to the launch of #CHiversity, a joint initiative of ArabHCI (est. 2016) was created to address the diversity and inclusion issues existing between HCI and the Arab community⁵. To leverage existing current understandings in this space, two core activities were launched; (1) encouraged participation during the ‘Diversity and Inclusion Lunch’ and (2) hosting a Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting to discuss the challenges of HCI in the Arab context, and the participation of Arab researchers [2]. Although distinctive from #CHiversity, both campaign teams identified commonalities in increased visibility of marginalised groups, mobilisation of existing resources, and shaping concrete plans for increased participation and engagement. Prior to, and during the conference, #CHiversity and ArabHCI exchanged expertise and collaborated by cross-posting information about the separate campaigns through social media, websites, and flyers shared during the conference. These actions were taken to encourage their participants to engage with both of these campaigns. Through this joint effort, reach was widened for both campaigns, which created more space for different communities to be better represented at CHI. The joint power facilitated addressing different spaces of diversity and inclusion

⁵ More information can be found at <https://arabhci.org/>

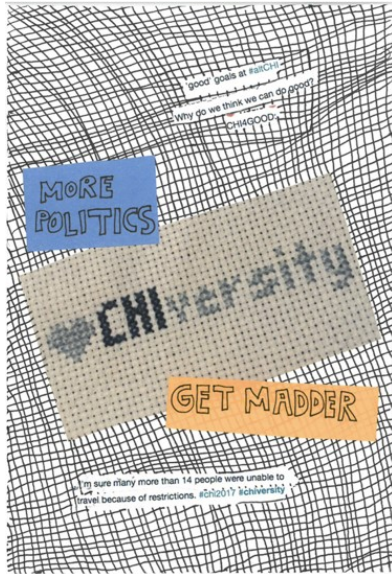


Figure 6: Rear cover of the #CHIiversity 2017 zine

matters and a growing of the overall community (Arab/Feminism/Activism).

Through the generation of spaces for shared dialogues, #CHIiversity was successfully able to connect different pockets of researchers that might not have had opportunity to interact in a social or professional context otherwise. #CHIiversity soon grew beyond a peer-support and interest group of a single university, to an expanding network of researchers who wished to further participate in efforts to make CHI a more diverse and inclusive space. In the future, we hope to collaborate with wider groups and movements, so we can promote both bottom-up and top-down approaches to intersectional diversity and inclusion campaigns.

Summary

This multiplicity of activities helped support active, intersectional inclusion for the purpose of diversity at CHI on a number of different levels, here we focus on three: (1) the individual person; (2) on a social level among CHI attendants and ACM members; and (3) the institutional level of SIGCHI and the ACM more widely. Many of the activities that were carried out during #CHIiversity were collaborative, but contained elements of personal wellbeing and mindfulness. For instance, the collaborative cross-stitch was built on ideas of mindfulness, and the creation of the zine allowed for cathartic exchange of experiences.

The ways in which these activities supported the connection of individuals however, also supported the building of a community that participated in #CHIiversity. The feminist CHI programme sustained community building before, during, and after the

conference. The collaboration with ArabHCI broadened the reach of the campaign, tearing down borders between isolated activist communities and instead built diverse spaces of discussion.

As a result of these observations, we also claim that the campaign was able to promote diversity and feminisms on a more institutional level. The use of the hashtag, as well as the @fempowertech Twitter account itself, were both on the list of most influential accounts and hashtags on Twitter throughout the conference. Working across these levels, networking came about based on the interests of participants in activism, crafting, diversity, or feminisms. Throughout the conference, we encouraged others to take part in our activities and continued building networks.

Diversifying Diversity Campaigns

We would like to make clear that we followed a positive approach to the campaign, with the purpose of #CHIiversity being to raise awareness of and platforms for positive examples of equality, diversity, and inclusion at CHI2017. We are already planning the way forward from the campaign for CHI2018 and hope to continue the trend for more years to come. Here, we want to bring forward some reflections on the campaign in the shape of implications for diversity campaigns at future SIGCHI (and any other) diversity events. We hope to see campaigns which (1) diversify topics by including what can sometimes be seen as 'politically polarizing research' (2) make use of existing diversity campaigns, and collaborate with existing groups to increase platforms, and (3) to diversify activities to support inclusion on various levels.

"Politically Polarising Research"

When working in the space of diversity and inclusion, topics that can be seen as 'polarising' are bound to arise. In these cases, we need to ensure that we as researchers are able to support organisations through our research, including through events hosted at SIGCHI conferences (such as #CHIiversity, CHI4Good, or the diversity lunch) without judgment. *Planned Parenthood* were seen as too "politically polarizing" through the lens applied by the CHI organisers in 2017, and were disallowed from being included in workshops and events. Though the intention here was perhaps to maintain political neutrality, excluding such organisations in and of itself constitutes a statement of political position by SIGCHI. We would argue that researchers should not have to disentangle politics from their research, or fight for the publication of work related to feminisms, women's health, trans rights, LGBT+ inclusion, neurodiversity, and accessibility in all other forms. Balaam writes: *"By limiting the organizations we can work with during SIGCHI events, do we limit the impact of the community and potentially marginalize the organizations and charities that need support, in favor of those which are potentially perceived to be more agreeable?"* [3].

Furthermore, we argue that rather than restricting certain types of research that may be seen as 'polarising', researchers should be encouraged to work towards the inclusion and justice of misrepresented groups. To improve diversity at future SIGCHI conferences, issues that lie outside of mainstream research (for example, in the importance of reproductive rights that we integrated in our campaign through craftivist, collaborative cross-stitch) must be allowed and encouraged in diversity campaigns, and

intersectionality must lie at the heart of future activities and events.

Collaborative Diversity

There is a history of diversity activities at CHI such as the women's breakfast that developed into the more intersectionally-focused diversity lunch in 2016. Furthermore, there is a growing number of researchers and groups of researchers interested in diversifying research topics and areas addressed by SIGCHI.

Groups such as ArabHCI, ICT4D or the ACM SIGCHI Research Ethics group, for example, are building communities of practice to improve the diversity and ethics involved in HCI research. We welcome developments such as these, as they promote diversity, equality, and inclusion beyond the usual 'women in tech' discussion towards more intersectional understandings of equity. With our campaign, we hoped to bring these topics of discussion to the forefront not only during the diversity lunch, but as an underlying point of discussion throughout the conference.

Learning from these separate developments, we attempted to collaborate with existing groups for our #CHIiversity campaign. We contacted the organizers of CHI4Good, as well as the diversity chairs of the conference, and ultimately were able to collaborate with ArabHCI. Through the collaboration, we were able to strengthen both of our separate campaigns by supporting one another. We hope to collaborate more widely in the future, and want to promote the importance of inclusivity and collaboration of diversity, inclusion, and equality campaigns. Rather than focusing on the 'uniqueness' of particular attempts of diversity, we would encourage future diversity campaigns to be

inclusive of existing groups, to collaborate with these and promote disparate campaigns to raise the platforms for one another.

Diversify Activities

While some of the activities we carried out at *#CHIversity* are standard conference occurrences (e.g. the feminist CHI programme, and Twitter hashtag) a strength of our campaign was the inclusion of non-mainstream, but longstanding feminist techniques of subversion; craftivism (such as the collaborative cross stitch and zine making) is a subversive technique used by feminists throughout history. We made use of our own knowledge of the history of these techniques and used our own experiences of using cross-stitch and zines for political subversion and activism to reach a different audience to the traditional activities that we would reach through the programme and Twitter. Having this multitude of activities allowed our campaign to promote the multiplicity of voices in the team of organisers as well as in the people who supported the campaign by joining in whichever way they felt was most appropriate for themselves.

On top of these high-level concerns of multiplicity, the craftivism also promoted a sense of personal wellbeing and connectedness among the network of people who participated. Both the cross-stitch and the zine making were cathartic exercises that allowed us to share our experiences of oppression at the conference, but also our positive experiences of the conference verbally to one another by talking over some stitching or drawing. On a different level however, the cross-stitch was also often seen as a welcome respite from the work that is involved in being a student volunteer, or from the anxiety that may be triggered by having to present and

ask questions, or from the 'networking' that is expected to take place during the breaks.

Based on these concerns, we advocate for the diversification of activities that promote inclusion or diversity at future SIGCHI events. These could support mis- or underrepresented individuals at these events on a number of levels: personal wellbeing, to support networking, but also on a macro level of visibility of different types of knowledges within the community.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have described the various activities involved in the *#CHIversity* campaign aimed at improving inclusivity at CHI2017. From these we learnt that 'diversity' must function on personal, community, and institutional levels while simultaneously ensuring intersectional inclusion. With this we mean, that it is intersectionality that ties together the importance of the inclusion of research that may be 'polarising', collaborative diversity and the diversification of activities themselves. As such, we want to conclude by reiterating our point again that we should focus on the active 'inclusion' as opposed to stopping at the passive 'diversity' at events and campaigns.

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